

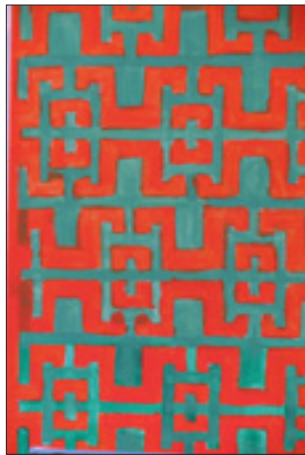
Wilderness House Literary Review 10/2

Pam Rosenblatt

Artist Marta Kaemmer and mixing up perception

When you walk into Waltham artist Marta Kaemmer's studio, you realize that you are not about to have an ordinary creative, artistic experience.

Yes, there are oil paintings hanging on the wall, which is not unusual in an artist's studio. Yes, there is a work table, which is not unusual in an artist's studio. Yes, there is a residential area, as she lives there, and that isn't uncommon either. And, of course, there are some windows, which bring light into the studio space. But scattered all around are cardboard columns, some pieces encased with yarn and others not yet wearing the eclectic colored fabric.



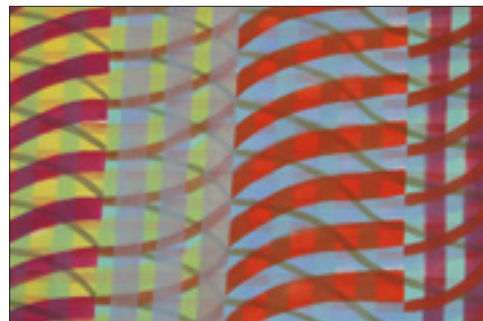
To Kaemmer, these cardboard columns, that sometimes reach six feet tall, are like towers, or trees in a forest. In fact, recently, Kaemmer had an exhibition at the Arsenal Center for the Arts in Waretown, Massachusetts, called "Changing Viewpoints" from January 9 – May 2, 2015.

The show was very innovative. Kaemmer had placed several of her "trees" on various steps that led up to the second floor of the art center, with oil paintings on canvas scattered about on the different steps. The end result was a metaphor for an "inside" forest of colorful, yarned cardboard columns. Her often vibrant and playful sculptures and paintings brightened up the gallery.

"As you can see, I go all over the place. Theoretically, I'm trained as a painter – oil painting – and I work abstractly with basically color, form, and the materials and just experimenting. I like making things. And whether I make a painting or an object – and what I'm thinking about art is playing with light – I pair it down to basic forms a lot. Or I work with dots and circles.

"And [in the beginning stages of this project], I thought about what a three dimensional canvas would look like so I came up with these columns. The painting could go all the way around it. [I call it] sculptural painting," explained Kaemmer in an April 18, 2015 Wilderness House Literary Review interview.

And why does Kaemmer create these towers made out of cardboard and covered with multi-hued yarn?



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“Again it’s working in the round. I like to idea in knitting that you take a line and you make a plane out of it that will be stretched over this cardboard column. I like creating a forest of them. That’s my forest that’s at the Arsenal right now,” she said. “They belong in a group, not alone.”

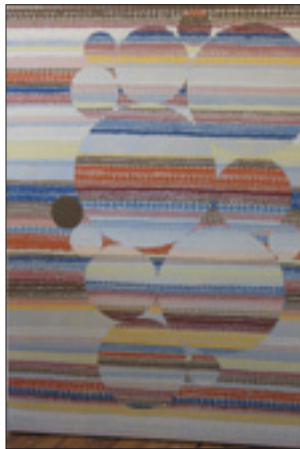
Kaemmer has developed her forest even a little further. She said that if you take a circle and if you were able to fold a column up, the altered perspective of the flattened tower would be displayed by the colorful lines seen when looking down at the circle on the floor.

By painting the colors of the yarned pieces onto a circular canvas, Kaemmer achieves different viewpoints. So, to describe it more concretely, if you stand over one of Kaemmer’s rather small paintings on canvas, they look like

the yarned sculpture painting that stands vertically.

Kaemmer really enjoys “mixing up how people generally perceive something. Like what is a painting? What if a painting is on the floor? Why does it have to be on the wall? And what is the difference between making a painting and creating a three dimensional object? Is a painting an object? You know, those kind of thoughts entertain me!”

Creating a sculptural painting often takes a long time, though it depends on how big they are. The bigger the column, the longer it takes to prepare the column and knit the fabric that encloses it.

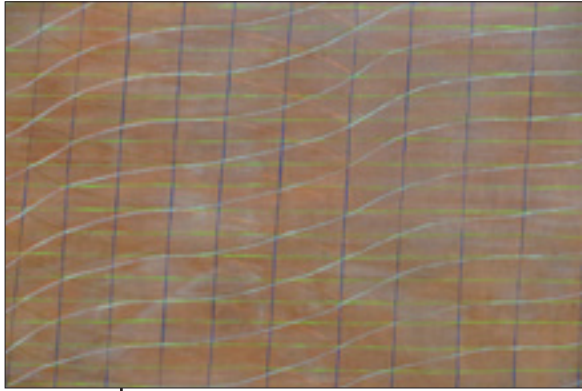


Kaemmer uses many different colored lines of yarn in her works. She finds playing with color fascinating. “I’m playing with color. I like to play with the intensity of the colors, with the hues, the values – all of these different things,” she said.

Grid work is used frequently in Kaemmer’s paintings. “I came up with a system with grid and it was basically just a repetition. I like repetition, [as can be seen in my knitting]. I focus myself and on the repeating a small habit over and over. What you can build out of that. And so these, the repetitions, were the freehand drawing of the grid. And then I proved it!



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I took 2 by 4, two of the grids wide and four down, and hand drew different imperfect lines. I thinned the oil paint and put it as more of a stain on the canvas and a traditional painting, very thin. But there are also a lot of layers and the thinned paint soaks into the canvas," she said.

Kaemmer tries "to control the grid, the structure that I came up with, and the size. What was varying were the colors and experimenting with the different color combinations. They are all 52 inches

by 40 inches. Then there is one larger [painting] which is a diptych that is 80 inches by 52 inches because it's two [panels] put together.

"The Cathedral" is one of Kaemmer's oil paintings. It has purples, oranges, reds, yellows, greens and blues painted on the canvas. "Mbira", another painting, has yellow and purple lines and squares on the canvas. Then, there is "The Fret", which is an oil on canvas diptych, with colors of blue and dark blue. Each of these abstract paintings obtained their titles because Kaemmer thought about them for a while. She did not simply assign an empty name to each one of them.



"The Cathedral", it reminded me of gothic arches – stained glass windows, etc.

'Mbira' – That was a really subtle painting, and it just had something very light about it. 'Mbira' is a Shona word for the thumb piano from Zimbabwe," Kaemmer explained. 'The Fret', I just like that word....'

But Kaemmer also appreciates the connotations that are conjured up with the word "fret". For example, "fret" can imply worrying or on another hand it can refer to the "frets" on the neck of a guitar. Such associations often are arrived at after the painting has materialized, Kaemmer said.

An eclectic artist, Kaemmer uses her media to pull pieces of her own life together. And as for the future of her craft, she said, "I'm just going to keep doing it to see what comes together!"

As for young artists interested in sculptural painting and/or oil painting, Kaemmer has some words of advice: "If it's really important to you, then go for it. It's not easy. But it's worth it. If you feel you need to do it, then you should do it!"

Marta Kaemmer received her Masters of Fine Arts from Boston University in 2011.